

EASTER

The celebration of the death, burial and resurrection of Yeshua of Nazareth is a proper, Godly thing. However, the manner in which many modern churches conduct this remembrance is marred by pagan influences. That is not to say that those who celebrate "Easter" with colored eggs, bunnies, etc., are pagans. However, in many cases they have incorporated these pagan concepts into their religious observance because of an ignorance of their origins. My purpose in writing this paper is to expose some of those origins.

First, let me explain that the LORD provided a series of festivals to celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Yeshua long before He died on that tree on Mt. Moriah. These festivals were designated by the LORD as holy convocations and appointed times (Lev. 23:4).

Holy convocations come from the Hebrew words *mikrah qodesh*. They indicate that these festivals are rehearsals for the fulfillment of the LORD's plan. At His first coming Yeshua fulfilled the first four of the seven rehearsals. And He fulfilled them at their appointed times (*mo'edim*). *Mo'edim* are appointments, much as you would make to see a doctor or barber. They are times the LORD set for the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. And Yeshua fulfilled them to the very month, the very day, the very hour. That is our assurance that He will fulfill the remaining three feasts. (Joel 2:23-24.).

The first festival is Passover. Leviticus 23:5 sets the date for Passover as the 14th day of the Biblical first month. On this date, the people were instructed to kill the Passover lamb. (Exodus 12:6) On this date, Yeshua was crucified. (Matthew 26:2, 17; John 19:31).

The next festival is Unleavened Bread. This festival is the day after Passover. It occurs on the 15th day of the Biblical first month. (Lev. 23:6). It teaches about the burial of Yeshua. Yeshua is the bread of life (John 6:35), born in Bethlehem (*beit lechem*) which means house of bread. As the bread is unleavened, Yeshua is without sin. The bread is striped and pierced for He was pierced and striped for us (Isaiah 53:5). The first day of the festival of Unleavened Bread is a sabbath day, even though it may not fall on the weekly sabbath. The LORD made it a sabbath day in Leviticus 23:7. A sabbath of this type is called a high sabbath (*shabbaton*). It was this day that John referred to in John 19:31 when he said "for that Sabbath was a high day." So, the disciples hurried to get Yeshua's body in the grave as Passover was giving way to Unleavened Bread.

The next festival is the feast of First Fruits of the barley harvest. This festival is not tied to a day of the month. Instead it is tied to a day of the week. The LORD set First Fruits as the first day of the week after the weekly sabbath of Passover. (Lev. 23:11). So, this festival will always fall on the day we call Sunday. This is the day on which Yeshua arose. For that reason, the Apostle Paul refers to Yeshua as "the firstfruits" of the resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:23).

These three festivals are collectively referred to as Passover or as Unleavened Bread in many writings. They teach the death, burial and resurrection of Yeshua. It was this series of festivals that was replaced by the Catholic Church in the Fourth Century by Easter.

At the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, the celebration was moved from Passover to Easter.

(Eusebius, History of the Jewish Nation, p.4.) In the book Ecclesiastical History by Eusebius, the letters from the Council of Nicea that made this change are included in the appendix translated by Rev. Isaac Boyle, D.D., including the letter from Emperor Constantine which gave the change the force of law for all the Roman Empire. The letter begins by stating what would seem like a worthy goal -- to have all people celebrate "Easter" on the same day. But Constantine would not let the people celebrate Passover. "And truly, in the first place, it seemed to everyone a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this most holy solemnity, who, polluted wretches! having stained their hands with a nefarious crime, are justly blinded in their minds.... Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews." Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, appendix p.52. Emperor Constantine continues on page 53 to say, "[a]s it is necessary that this fault should be so amended that we may have nothing in common with the usage of these parricides and murderers of our Lord...." There are other similar remarks that could be quoted, but these suffice to show that Easter was substituted for Passover, not because the church believed that Easter was the correct celebration of Yeshua's resurrection, but because of an anti-Semitic hatred for the Jews and their customs.

In fact, the Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, on page 355 states -- "From this Pasch the Pagan festival of Easter was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt Pagan festivals to Christianity."

Thus, for hatred of the Jews, the church at Rome replaced the LORD's festivals of Leviticus 23 with pagan festivals. In fact, the Council of Nicea decreed that if Passover and Easter should fall on the same date, that Easter had to be celebrated on the Sunday following Passover so that the two feasts could not be celebrated on the same day. (Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, pp. 268-270). The same source, on page 268, notes that the Christian churches in the East, "which were closer to the birthplace of the new religion and in which old traditions were strong, observed Easter according to the date of the Passover festival." But the Western churches set the date for Easter using the vernal equinox. Of the early church in apostolic times, before Nicea, the Rev. Hislop relates in his book The Two Babylons, "[t]hat festival agreed originally with the time of the Jewish Passover, when Christ was crucified.... That festival was not idolatrous, and it was preceded by no Lent." (*Id.*, p. 104). He continues, "[t]he forty days' abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshippers of the Babylonian goddess." He says that the forty days of Lent were still being practiced among "the Yezidis or Pagan Devil-worshippers of Koordistan." On page 105, Rev. Hislop continues, "[t]o conciliate the pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated...."

Even the name Easter is a derivation of Astarte (Ishtar) -- a pagan deity said to be the "queen of heaven". Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 354. See also, Hislop, The Two Babylons, p. 103, "Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven.... That name, as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar." And the Compton's Encyclopedia from CompuServe describes Astarte as "the goddess of fertility and sexual love and of war.... Her Babylonian and Greek counterparts were ISHTAR and APHRODITE." Fertility rites performed for Ishtar and Tammuz (her son/lover) included "[r]itual prostitution, human and animal sacrifice...."

The celebration of Easter incorporates many pagan traditions, or as the Funk & Wagnalls

New Encyclopedia calls them on page 267, "pre-Christian traditions." According to The American Peoples Encyclopedia, p. 7-483, "[m]any of the popular observances of Easter are pagan in origin. Some may be traced to the feast of the goddess Eostra." Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia includes within the traditions used in the worship of the false goddess of fertility (Ishtar - Astarte - Eastre - Eostra) the traditions of the "Easter rabbit, a symbol of fertility, and in colored Easter eggs...." Likewise, The American Peoples Encyclopedia states, "[t]he Easter egg and Easter rabbit are also pagan in origin." (*Id.*, p. 7-483). Rabbits and chicks were used because they are such fertile animals and Ishtar is the goddess of fertility. Rev. Hislop also states that the "hot cross buns of Good Friday, and the dyed eggs of Pasch or Easter Sunday, figured in the Chaldean rites just as they do now." (The Two Babylons, p. 108.) After describing the pagan origins of the hot crossed buns, he says the "origin of the Pasch eggs is just as clear." He traces the Easter egg all the way back to Babylon and the myth of how Astarte (Ishtar) was hatched out of an enormous egg that fell from heaven into the Euphrates River. She was said to exist before the flood, and used the egg as her instrument of reincarnation. According to Rev. Hislop, the church then adopted this egg as the symbol of Yeshua's resurrection, and added a prayer by Pope Paul V, "Bless, O Lord, we beseech thee, this thy creature of eggs, that it may become a wholesome sustenance unto thy servants, eating it in remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, &etc." (p. 110).

While many would argue that this information is difficult to find, I found abundance on my own bookshelves. I even found a cartoon in the Montgomery Advertiser, April 14, 1995. The Wizard of Id has the drunk named Bung deliver an Easter egg from the wizard to the king. The king asks, "What's this?" Bung answers, "An Ishtar egg." The king asks "What's an Ishtar, lackey?" The courtier replies, "A pagan goddess of fertility." The king asks, "What could she possibly have to do with Easter?" And the courtier replies, "A billion bunnies comes to mind." While I do not advocate using the comic strip as a source of doctrine, it does illustrate that this information is not as well hidden as some might believe.

But we have Christianized these practices, haven't we? In Deuteronomy 12:1-4 and in Deuteronomy 12:29-32, the LORD instructs the people -- Israel and a great mixed multitude -- that when they enter the Promised Land they are not to worship Him with anything that was used in pagan idolatry. Moreover in Job 14:4 we see this, "[w]ho can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing? No one!" While the concept of syncretism is appealing, the LORD does not want to be worshipped with pagan practices. Imagine the hurt our LORD must feel when we remember the death, burial and resurrection of His only begotten Son by the term Ishtar, Astarte, Easter -- the language changes, but the abomination of that name should never be equated to the sacrifice of the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29.) In fact, in Exodus 23:13, just before discussing Passover, the LORD said, "[a]nd in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth."

In Deuteronomy 6:7, the LORD instructed us to teach our children about God. Instead, we teach our children practices used in the worship of pagan idols, and we expect the LORD to be pleased! The Jews in Babylon were made to color their eggs in the blood of idolatrous sacrifices. We teach our children to color eggs. What can our children possibly learn about Yeshua from coloring eggs left by the Easter Bunny and eating chocolate bunnies and chicks?

If we are unwilling to remember the death, burial and resurrection of Yeshua through the

feasts of the LORD -- He said they were His feasts -- let's at least remove the paganism from this most holy convocation.

Perhaps we should consider the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians, when he told the Gentile church at Corinth, "[y]ou know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols" (1 Cor. 12:2), and to "keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you." (1 Cor. 11:2). He used the example of Yeshua at His final Passover meal with His disciples when he quoted Yeshua in 1 Cor. 11:17-34 as instructing His disciples to "do this in remembrance of me." They were to keep the Passover in remembrance of His death, burial and resurrection, rather than focusing on the Exodus from Egypt. The archetype had fulfilled the type.

Just as Christians would rebel if we suggested that Easter be renamed Buddah day (which we do not), the name Easter should send chills up a Christian's spine when referring to Yeshua's resurrection. Likewise, pagan festivities do not help us commemorate or venerate the greatest sacrifice in the history of the world.